



## **Untying the Language, Body and Place Connection**

### **Linguistic variation and social style in a Copenhagen community of practice**

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## VII. Exemplary Studies

### 35. Untying the language-body-place connection: A study on linguistic variation and social style in a Copenhagen community of practice

1. Introduction
2. Language and place – in the wake of globalization
3. Place and body – the community as a social construct
4. Body and language – deconstructing the authentic speaker
5. Conclusion
6. References

#### 1. Introduction

It is a deep-rooted conviction that languages, speakers and places constitute a unity. Languages belong to specific speakers, and speakers belong to specific places. In spite of the fact that many people in Denmark (especially in the larger cities) experience daily that one place may contain different speakers and more than one language, the belief that a language and its speakers belong to a specific place is profound. Danish is thought to belong to Danes, and Danes are thought to live in Denmark. The tying together of places, languages and people is not only characteristic of most lay people's conceptualizations of languages. A tight connection between place, body and language also lies at the basis of most sociolinguistic and dialect studies, whether linguistic variation is described horizontally, as linked to geography, or vertically, as linked to social stratification. Languages and dialects have traditionally been treated as belonging to a place; so have speakers. The ideal informant lives in the place in which he and his parents were born. Furthermore, the speaker is believed to incarnate one, and only one, authentic language (*the vernacular* of the Labovian tradition). Although both dialectology and sociolinguistics have been harshly criticized for their rigid treatments of speaker categories (gender, class, age and ethnicity), there has in general been little focus on the insufficiently thought-out connection between body, language and place. However, in today's large cities, where mobility and heterogeneity seem to be the norm rather than the exception, it is difficult, if not impossible, to uncritically maintain the language-body-place connection as the starting point for a linguistic description.

In a globalized world where people move and communicate around the globe, it is easy to problematize a taken-for-granted connection between language, body and place. For the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (1998: 12–18), the notion of globalization entails a contraction of time and space, which follows in the wake of late modern technologies. Bodies are able to move and communicate over long distances at greater and greater speeds at less and less cost. Consequently, bodies (the privileged ones) are less tied to specific geographical places – and, drawing on Paul Virilio, Bauman even talks about

“the end of geography” (1998: 12). Anthony Giddens likewise (1991: 21–23) claims that globalization reorganizes time and space with fundamental human consequences in that a “globalisation of social activity” collides with established traditional practices. Giddens and Bauman thus argue that the consequences of globalization influence and restructure social organization, practices and identities (Bauman 1998: 18–26; Giddens 1991: 14–34). Such deep-seated changes also impact the study of language and communication, perhaps especially the sociolinguistic study of language variation in cities. The populations of larger cities become ethnically and linguistically more heterogeneous as migration increases (at least this has been the case in most of Europe; Extra and Gorter 2001). New communication technologies, mobile telephony and the World Wide Web reorganize communicative spaces and bring, so to speak, globalization into the core of speakers’ daily communicative practices. A perspective on language that involves treating one place as having one language or one dialect is a considerable simplification.

The aim of this article is to show how the body-language-place connection shatters when the study focuses on language variation in ethnically mixed urban communities. I will in turn critically scrutinize connections between language and place, place and body, and body and language. This will be done through a presentation of findings from a study of language variation and social style in a Copenhagen community of practice (Quist 2005). Notions of style and practice will be developed as the main means needed to grasp the complexity of “language, body and place” in the study of linguistic variation.

## 2. Language and place – in the wake of globalization

The Copenhagen speech community, in variationist studies, has traditionally been described as composed of two sociolects: low Copenhagen (used by working-class speakers) and high Copenhagen (used by middle and upper-class speakers; Brink and Lund 1975; Jørgensen 1980; Gregersen and Pedersen 1991b). Jørgensen (1980) and Gregersen and Pedersen (1991b) describe studies designed in line with the Labovian paradigm, defining a “Copenhagen speaker” as somebody who was born in Copenhagen (and preferably whose parents were also born in Copenhagen). In the Gregersen and Pedersen study, however, the criterion of being native to Copenhagen was difficult to maintain, as it turned out that only ten percent of the inhabitants had lived in the neighborhood under study for more than ten years (Gregersen 1989: 49; Gregersen and Pedersen 1991a). These proportions may even be lower today. We still find speakers of the traditional sociolects, low and high Copenhagen, but they hardly complete the picture of the linguistic variation in the city. If we today made second-generation nativeness to Copenhagen (excluding all second-generation immigrants from other countries) the criterion for delimiting Copenhagen speakers, we would end up with very few and certainly unrepresentative speakers. Thus, if we wish to gain substantial insight into the development, use and change in Copenhagen speech, we will have to employ methods other than those traditionally used (Brink and Lund 1975; Jørgensen 1980; Gregersen and Pedersen 1991b).

The geographical place that we call Copenhagen contains a multitude of languages and language varieties *and* speakers who live with and use this multitude. The study

Tab. 35.1: Highest level of education attained by parents. Approximately 53 students attended the two high school classes during the five months of observation (some dropped out during the study, others arrived later). We have information on parents' educational backgrounds from 47 students

Highest level of education attained	Number of students
Extended tertiary study / university	14
Mid-level higher education (skilled workers, teachers, etc.)	22
Basic schooling (unskilled workers)	11

Tab. 35.2: Parents' migration/linguistic backgrounds

Parents' backgrounds	Number of students
Both parents have a Danish ethnic background	27
One parent has a non-Danish ethnic background	7 (whereby all mothers have Danish backgrounds; fathers: 2 of Moroccan descent, 1 Iraqi, 1 British, 1 South African, 1 Greek, 1 French)
Both parents have a non-Danish ethnic background	19 (5 students of Pakistani descent, 3 Turkish, 2 Moroccan, 2 Lebanese, 1 Iraqi, 1 Syrian, 1 Bosnian, 1 Faroese, 1 Jordanian, 1 Kuwaiti, 1 Sudanese)

described in this article illustrates this. It was conducted in 2002 in central Copenhagen, in the Nørrebro neighborhood. It was based on five months of ethnographic research conducted with two high-school classes at *Metropolitanskolen*, an ethnically mixed school. Besides participant observation, data consisting of 52 interviews, ten group recordings, self-recordings and questionnaires was collected (Quist 2005: 85–118).

Traditionally, Nørrebro has been a working class area and stereotypically considered a stronghold of the low Copenhagen sociolect. However, during the last twenty to thirty years, the population has become ethnically and socially more diverse. Immigrants from Turkey, the former Yugoslavia, the Middle East and Pakistan settled in Nørrebro in the 1970s and 1980s. Later, during the 1990s, (parts of) Nørrebro, like other areas of inner Copenhagen, experienced a process of gentrification, with an influx of people with middle-class incomes, especially artists and academics. These demographic developments are reflected in the composition of the student body at *Metropolitanskolen*. In Table 35.1, we can see that 22 of the students in the two classes included in the study have parents with mid-level higher education (i.e., three to four years of training after nine or ten years of basic schooling). Fourteen students have parents with university degrees, and eleven students have parents with only basic school education (by and large, immigrant and Danish parents are evenly distributed across all three categories). Table 35.2 shows that about half of the students have Danish ethnic backgrounds, which means that they grew up in monolingual Danish homes. The other half grew up in families where Danish is the second or third language. Seven of the students have fathers of foreign descent and Danish mothers (incidentally, in this study there are no Danish fathers who married foreigners). Nineteen students have parents who themselves immigrated to Denmark. Most of them came in the 1970s.

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## HSK Language & Space

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Taken together, Tables 35.1 and 35.2 show that the students in the two classes constitute a variegated group of individuals of different social, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. Students with Danish ethnic backgrounds form the largest group. Still, it is no exaggeration to consider *Metropolitanskolen* to be demographically heterogeneous. Half of the students have mother tongues other than Danish. From time to time, some of them codeswitch between L1 and L2 (viz. those who speak Turkish, Punjabi/Urdu and Arabic). The linguistic picture is much more complex than that which the earlier studies of low and high Copenhagen sociolects were able to capture (Quist 2006). Danish is spoken in a variety of ways, for example, the use of *multi-ethnolect* is common (Quist 2000: 2008). There is no one-to-one correspondence between the physical place, here the *Metropolitanskolen*, and (one variety of) the Danish language (or the low Copenhagen sociolect).

That different languages and varieties are present is due not only to the different backgrounds of the students. The communication technologies (Internet and mobile phones) that students integrate into their daily communicative practices bring in languages and varieties from other places. In some Danish high schools today, students are provided with a personal laptop, which they are also allowed to take home. This was the case in the two classes under study. At *Metropolitanskolen*, the students were able to connect their personal laptops wirelessly to the Internet at all times and places in the school. And so they did! They were online from the beginning of the school day until leaving school in the afternoon (and most of them were online again when they got home). During lunch breaks, for instance, the classrooms were filled with sounds from the computers. The students visited both Danish and foreign (mostly youth-oriented) websites where they watched short videos and listened to music. They also used the computers for instant messaging, e-mailing, and website-based chatting. The school premises, chiefly the classroom, constituted the physical place in which the students created their communicative spaces. Among other things, these spaces were characterized by (1) the virtual presence of interlocutors who were physically to be found in other places, in other cities and countries for example; and (2) the virtual presence, through websites, of different languages, mainly Danish and English (including different varieties of these languages), but also Turkish, Arabic, Hindi and other minority languages.

In sum, the consequences of globalization – people’s mobility and new communication technologies – are evident at *Metropolitanskolen*: (1) the composition of students reflects the social and ethnic heterogeneity of the neighborhood, thus bringing in different languages and varieties; and (2) the use of laptops and mobile phones means that virtual interlocutors, languages and varieties are present and integrated into daily communication practices.

*Metropolitaskolen* is not exceptional. In Copenhagen we find many *communities of practice* (this notion is described below) characterized by a diversity of languages and forms of communication that exceed the physical place. This reality is a challenge that sociolinguistic study needs to face. It is not a new critique that disciplines like geographical dialectology and variationist sociolinguistics seem to treat places as more homogeneous than is justifiable. Le Page, Gumperz and others (Gumperz 1962: 133; Le Page 1980: 336) have argued that a definition of a speech community must include all its speakers and languages (codes), because, in Gumperz’ words, “the criterion for inclusion of a code in a study of a linguistic community is that its exclusion will produce a gap in the communication matrix” (1962: 134). What is new in this discussion, however, is the

possibility for speakers to create virtual communicative spaces – not parallel to face-to-face interactions, but integrated into ongoing face-to-face interactions. (We shall look at an example of this later in this article.) Interlocutors, languages and varieties are in contact *in* and *across* *Metropolitanskolen* as a physical place. If we were to leave out the virtual communication, there would indeed be a “gap in the communication matrix”. The question is how the virtual communication and linguistic diversity can be included in a sociolinguistic study. One suggestion is to implement the notion of “community of practice” and to base the study in ethnography (see the next section for further discussion).

The complex heterogeneity at *Metropolitanskolen* does not result in linguistic randomness or in an absence of patterns in language variation, choice and use. Nor does it result in different groups of students using different distinct styles without sharing and borrowing from each other. In the next section, we take a closer look at an example of how a traditional sociolinguistic variable distributes in unexpected ways and forms part of stylistic practices.

### 3. Place and body – the community as a social construct

The diversity of speakers in Copenhagen, and at *Metropolitanskolen*, is largely an effect of the mobility of speakers, who move across country borders, city borders and between different communities within the city. Hence, if we wish to capture the linguistic diversity of a specific place, we need a concept of *community* that does not treat the connection between body and place as static. *Community of practice* is such a concept. It captures the dynamism of peoples’ connections to places by considering the community as a social construct. One advantage of approaching the speech community as consisting of communities of practice is that it allows for a multiplicity of linguistic codes and (mobile) speakers.

Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet (1992) suggest that the notion of community of practice should be useful in the sociolinguistic study of language and gender. They borrowed the term from Lave and Wenger’s theory of situated learning (1991), the main idea of which is that learning takes place in active engagement in practices. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet argue that the social meaning of linguistic variation is actively produced and reproduced through practices within the communities in which speakers engage.

According to Wenger (1998: 73), a community of practice is characterized by three dimensions: *mutual engagement*, *joint enterprise* and a *shared repertoire*. All three dimensions are characteristic of the two high school classes at *Metropolitanskolen*, and the classes are thus defined as a community of practice (Quist 2005: 53–57). The students are mutually engaged in the daily activities that take place within the framework of the school. This means going to school every day from Monday to Friday, attending classes on specific topics at specific times of the day, all in anticipation of completing the final *studentereksamen* (upper secondary examination). So, going to school, taking part in lessons, being in the right place at the right time is part of what we may call the joint enterprise. Within this framework, which is largely defined for them by others, the students mutually engage in daily activities such as hanging out in classrooms during

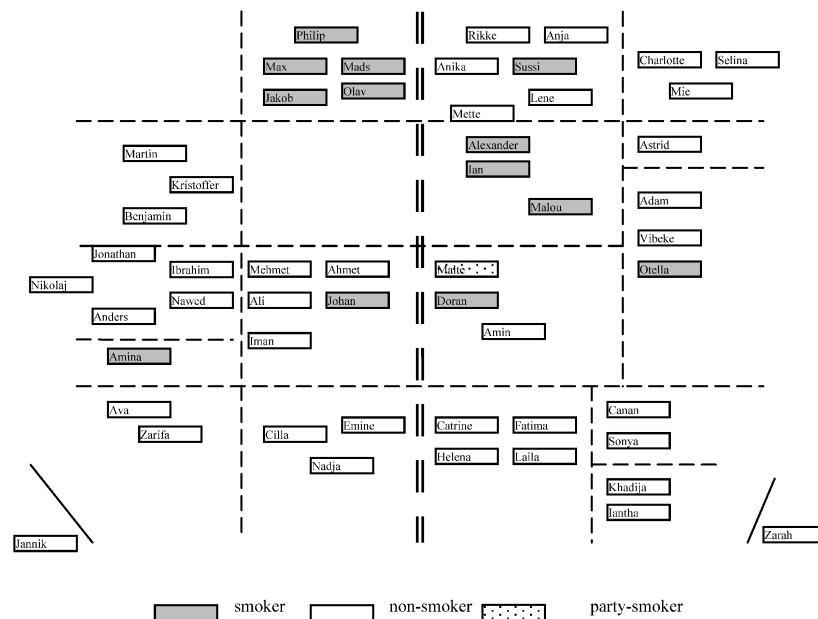


Fig. 35.1: Smokers and non-smokers

breaks, playing basketball in the school yard, smoking under the roofed porch, doing assignments in groups in the lab, helping each other out with the latest math homework, playing games or sharing music on their computers, etc. Through all such activities the students develop a shared repertoire of signs and resources that over the course of time become socially meaningful to them, i. e., become part of stylistic practices (Quist 2005: 76–78).

The students were observed over five months, beginning with their first day at school. Drawings indicating each person's position in the classrooms, hallways, yard, etc. were collected in a field diary. After a few weeks, everybody moved around in regular patterns (as illustrated in Figures 35.1 and 35.2). In other words, the same people spent their breaks in the school yard; the same people stayed in the classroom; the same people sat next to each other and worked together in group sessions during lessons.

Through their routine movements, the students connect their daily practices to the physical place of *Metropolitanskolen* (or maybe better, *in interaction with* the physical place). The movements/positions overlap different kinds of practices. As a brief example, we can take a look at *smoking*. In Figure 35.1, the grey rectangles signify those who smoke, the white rectangles those who do not smoke and the dotted rectangle signifies a person who only smokes at parties. The sociogram illustrates that there is a group of smokers in class B who hang out together (Olav, Mads, Philip, Max, Jakob), a group of smokers in class A (Alexander, Ian, Malou + Malte and Doran) and a few more smokers distributed across the space.

The students' names are also plotted on the chart, which presents us with even more information, namely the gender identity of the students. In general, boys move around in proximity to other boys, and girls close to other girls (Malou and Adam are the



only exceptions). Although the sociograms present a static picture of something which is inherently dynamic, they do give us an idea of patterns and regularities in the practices of the two high school classes. From Figure 35.1, for instance, it is clear that there are at least two groups of boys who move in proximity to each other, and who smoke. These boys have more things in common. In fact, they perform a series of practices that taken together can be analyzed as a *style cluster*.

A *style cluster* is defined in Quist (2005: 199) as a collection of signs that over the course of time cluster together, i. e., they are performed in regular patterns by the members of the community of practice. The notion of sign is defined broadly here, to include body signs (gendered and racial), signs of school attitude, physical positioning in the school area, preferences for music, clothing, and so on. It is argued that it is the regularity of the clustering that makes the style clusters socially meaningful as part of a shared repertoire of the community of practice.

Space does not allow a detailed presentation of the style clusters. Instead, we shall focus on one linguistic element, a Copenhagen sociolinguistic variable that varies across the two high-school classes as part of the style clusters: the affrication of *t* in onset position. Brink and Lund (1975: 353–355) report that an affricated *t* in onset position is characteristic of low Copenhagen speech in the entire period of their study (they base their description of the Copenhagen sociolects on recordings from the Danish National Radio Archive, which includes speakers who were born in the years 1840–1955). The absence of affrication of *t* was a characteristic feature of speakers of high Copenhagen born in the nineteenth century; for example the number *to* ‘two’ was pronounced [dho'] (‘ marks the Danish stød). This complete absence of affrication disappears from Copenhagen speech at the beginning of the twentieth century, but affrication of *t* remains a sociolinguistic variable in that long/strong affrication is associated with low Copenhagen and short/weak affrication with high Copenhagen.

Parallel to the findings of Brink and Lund, Fisher-Jørgensen reports from an acoustic investigation that young Copenhagen speakers aspirate the unvoiced stop consonants /p/, /t/ and /k/ for longer than do older speakers, namely between 90 and 100 milliseconds, compared to the older speakers’ approximately 70 milliseconds (Fisher-Jørgensen 1980; Fischer-Jørgensen/Hutters 1981: 79). Since low Copenhagen in general has been associated with young and modern speech (Brink and Lund 1974), it is of no surprise that Fisher-Jørgensen reports that younger Copenhageners pronounce a longer *t* than do older Copenhageners. (She did not look at differences in socioeconomic background.)

If we were to follow a traditional sociolinguistic model, in line with Brink and Lund’s description of the two Copenhagen sociolects, we would predict the affrication of *t* to distribute in accordance with the socioeconomic backgrounds (of the parents) of the students at *Metropolitanskolen*. Alternatively, if we were to follow the implicit language change predictions in Fisher-Jørgensen’s study, we would expect no significant variation in the affrication of *t* at all, since the students in the two classes belong to the same age group (they are between 15 and 16 years old). However, an analysis of word initial *t* among the students at *Metropolitanskolen* shows that neither of the two predictions holds. There *is* systematic variation in the affrication of *t*, but the distribution correlates with neither socioeconomic background nor, obviously, age.

The ethnographic study and an explorative study of the recorded data indicated that the strong/long *t* was mostly used by some of the “white” boys, those called *danskerne*



‘the Danes’ in this community of practice. So the duration of the affrication of word initial *t* was measured for 52 speakers. All in all, 402 tokens were measured using the PRAAT software; that is approximately eight tokens per person. An “analysis of variance” test of the duration of the *ts* indicated that there was a statistically significant difference, overall, between the four groups: boys with Danish ethnic backgrounds, girls with Danish ethnic backgrounds, boys with an ethnic background other than Danish, and girls with an ethnic background other than Danish. The results are shown in Table 35.3. Boys with Danish ethnic backgrounds sustained their affricated *ts* the longest (109 milliseconds on average), while boys with a different ethnic background had the shortest affrications (92 milliseconds on average).

Tab. 35.3: Duration of *t*-affrication in four groups according to gender and ethnic background

Group	Number of tokens	Average	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i> -value
Boys – Danish	135	0.109	9.910	0.0001
Girls – other	103	0.099		
Girls – Danish	111	0.098		
Boys – other	53	0.092		

*Post hoc* tests showed that boys with Danish ethnic backgrounds had longer lasting affrications than did all other groups (all  $p = 0.0001$ ). The difference between the two groups of girls was not significant, while the boys with a non-Danish ethnic background had significantly shorter *t*-affrications than did the girls overall. The *ts* were measured in two contexts: interviews and group sessions. The group pattern of variation was the same in both situations.

The variation in *t*-affrication does not correspond to the socioeconomic backgrounds of the parents (categorized according to the amount of education as shown in Table 35.1). The variable correlates in this community of practice first and foremost with gender and ethnicity (Quist 2005: 222–225). Interestingly, however, a closer look at the boys with Danish ethnic backgrounds reveals that the boys who perform style cluster 1 are the ones who use the longest *ts*.

Style cluster 1 is primarily performed by boys with white skin; i.e., those who are recognized as “Danes”. They show little interest in official school activities (they rarely do their homework and are relatively passive during lessons). They use their personal laptops primarily for games, music and communication (e-mail, chat and messaging). On the computer screens they typically display images of half-naked women (e.g., pin-ups). They also use their computers to search for and share music, mostly hip-hop and rock music. These boys smoke cigarettes, so they go to the outdoor smoking areas during the breaks, and they leave the school premises during lunchtime. They drink alcohol and talk about alcohol at school. The clothes they wear are a sort of hip-hop style with baggy jeans and large T-shirts. As for the linguistic resources analyzed, these boys had the longest affrication of word initial *t*, they used more slang and more swear words than did the others, and they never used multi-ethnolect, except in instances of parody. (For details about the specific style features, see Quist 2005: chapters 9 to 14.)

A style cluster should not be confused with a group of individuals (“group” in the sense used in theory of social identity; Hogg and Abrams 1998), but rather understood

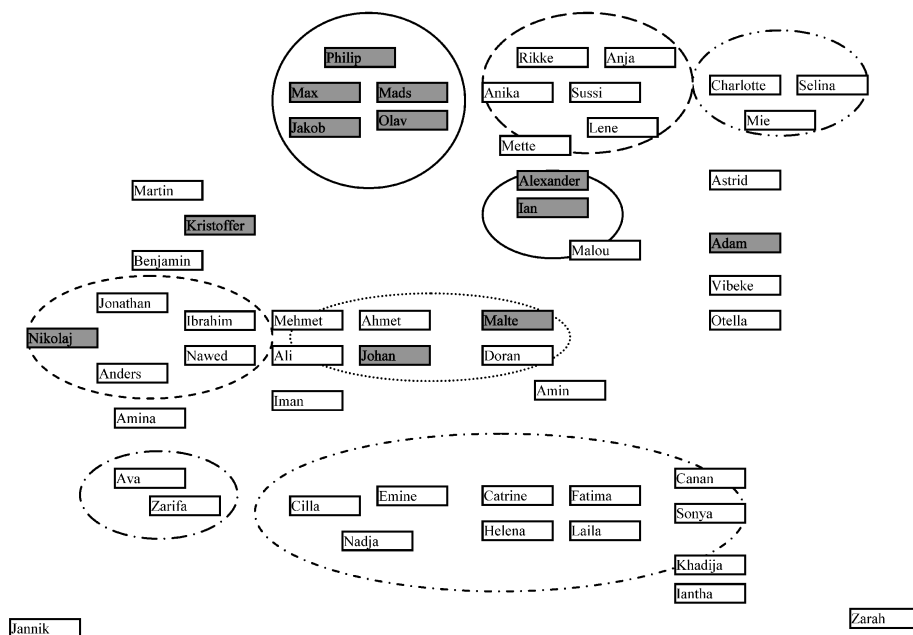


Fig. 35.2: Style clusters and the twelve boys with the longest *t*-affrications

as a collection of signs and practices that some individuals perform more than others. Members of a group may perform resources from different clusters. In Figure 35.2, the seven style clusters that were identified at *Metropolitanskolen* are illustrated with a circle around their prime performers. Style cluster 1 is illustrated with a solid line, indicating that Philip, Max, Mads, Jakob, Olav, Alexander and Ian are the core performers of this cluster. The twelve boys who have the longest *t*-affrications in this community of practice are marked in gray.

From Figure 35.2, we see that the style cluster 1 performers are all also users of long *t*-affrication. Malou (female) hangs out with Alexander and Ian, and sometimes with Adam, Vibeke and Otella. She does not perform all practices that characterize style cluster 1; e.g., she wears different clothes to the boys, she displays other types of images on her laptop, but she smokes, and she exhibits a reluctant attitude to school, just like Alexander and Ian. That is why she is portrayed on the line, a little inside and a little outside of the solid circle. Malou exemplifies the fact that some students do not perform all practices of a style cluster; that is, it is not possible to situate her as a core performer of a cluster.

Figure 35.2 also shows that there are boys who do not perform all elements of style cluster 1: but who still use long affrication of *t*, namely Malte, Johan, Adam, Nikolaj and Kristoffer. Some of them perform other clusters (Nikolaj, style cluster 3; Johan and Malte, style cluster 2), and Adam and Kristoffer perform practices that do not make up a systematic pattern. These exceptions and the foreshortened exposé of the style clusters may leave us with the feeling that there is little of coherence going on as far as sociolinguistic variation is concerned. The methods of analysis employed in the study do not provide a clear-cut coherent and complete picture of language use. The study of the

community of practice at *Metropolitanskolen* gives us something else: it gives us insight into patterns and regularities of performance by Copenhagen speakers in daily practice. We find regularities *and* exceptions to the regularities. The variation of *t* in connection with the style clusters shows us that the variation forms part of the social and linguistic landscape in a much more complex way than a more traditional approach to the Copenhagen speech community is able to capture. In the context of this article, it is especially important to stress that the heterogeneity of speakers in late-modern Copenhagen does not result in complete muddled variation. We do find regularities in linguistic variation and the performance of practices. The linguistic variation is connected to stylistic practices, and practices connect the speakers to the locus of *Metropolitanskolen*.

#### 4. Body and language – deconstructing the authentic speaker

We now turn to the last of the three pairs of connections treated in this article, namely the connection that is typically made between a body and a language (or a body and a dialect/variety). It is an implicit assumption of traditional dialectology and sociolinguistics that “one body holds one authentic language”. This assumption is parallel to the ideas (or ideologies, see Bucholtz 2003) of the *authentic speaker* and *authentic speech*, as discussed and problematized in sociolinguistics in recent years (by, for instance, Eckert 2003; Bucholtz 2003; and Coupland 2003). The sociolinguistic search for *authentic speakers* and *authentic speech* is in general parallel to the connections made between language, body and place. *Authentic speakers* are considered by the researcher to be such precisely because they belong to a specific geographic place. The same holds for *authentic speech*. Eckert (2003: 392) puts it this way:

Authenticity is constructed in relation to particular locations such as the traditional peasant in an isolated community (Holmquist 1985), the street kid in the inner city (Labov 1972[b]), and the burned-out burnout in a Midwestern high school (Eckert 2000). Locally located and oriented, the Authentic Speaker produces linguistic output that emerges naturally in and from that location.

Bucholtz argues that the idea of authentic speech and authentic speakers is reproduced in an ideology which she describes in terms of *the linguist as an obstacle to authenticity*: “even if we find authentic speakers, they may not produce authentic speech in our presence” (2003: 406). Labov’s notion of the *observer’s paradox* (Labov 1972a) reflects this ideology. The *paradox* is that the researcher should aim at “capturing” speech as it is used *without* the presence of the researcher, the assumption being that the speaker possesses an authentic way of speaking, the collection of which – by way of mere presence – can be hindered by the researcher. To Labov, the most authentic speech is the *vernacular* in its most casual form. The *vernacular* can be “captured” in a “sociolinguistic interview” or in “the field” at local locations, where people are engaged in leisure time activities:

As we enter the city we look for preadolescent and adolescent peer groups engaged in sports or hanging-out; we encounter family groups at tea or after dinner; we join old men at bowls; in pubs; or sitting at pensioner’s benches (Labov 1972b: 256).

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#### HSK Language & Space

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Labov clearly preferred non-institutionalized settings as his research ground, i.e., he would try to avoid work places and schools for instance. Bucholtz calls such favoring of quotidian language and settings an ideology of “linguistic mundaneness” (Bucholtz 2003: 405). Although sociolinguistics represents an important repudiation of linguistics’ taking of introspection and context-free sentences as the only evidence of language, there has been a tendency to restrict the study of language use to “a narrow subset of all language use” (Bucholtz 2003: 406). In contrast to the speakers in Labov’s study of language in the inner city (Labov 1972b), young people in Copenhagen do not hang out together much outside of institutions. A young Copenhagener spends most of his or her time by far in school, recreational classes or at institutionalized leisure time activities in venues such as sports clubs and youth clubs. Therefore, it would represent a crude truncation of the reality of these youngsters to restrict a study of their speech to times in which they are not in an institutionally organized setting. Arguably, a lunch break at *Metropolitanskolen* is just as casual and relaxed as the types of settings Labov refers to in the quotation above.

The vernacular in its most casual and unconscious form is thought to be the most authentic representation of a person’s language. If we take the observed linguistic practices at *Metropolitanskolen* as our case in point, we will see that it is difficult, if not impossible, to decide where and when in the flow of language use the most authentic representation is found. The students in the two classes constantly make use of a broad repertoire of languages and varieties; they cite, imitate, make parodies, perform (in Bauman’s [1986] sense of the word), sing, do language crossing (Rampton 1995) – and they do all of this much more than they do not.

Let us look at an extract from a conversation between three girls at Metropolitanskolen. The extract is taken from self-recordings done by Catrine, a girl with a Danish ethnic background, who is a typical performer of style cluster 6 (Quist 2005: 198–200). She has, as usual, her laptop on. She is playing music so loudly on it that it almost drowns out the music played on the other computers in the room. To Catrine’s right is Helena, who also has her computer on. Both of them are searching the Internet as they talk to each other. Helena is looking for a specific mp3 file of a Turkish song, and she is trying to get Catrine involved in the search (lines 6, 22, 25 and 27). But Catrine does not want to help Helena. She is busy looking for sites that will inspire her in her search for a new instant messaging alias. Catrine is tired of her existing name, which is a compound of Catrine and the Muslim name Aisha: Caisha. Right behind Catrine and Helena is Amina. She is looking at Catrine’s computer screen trying to help her find a new alias. [A modified CA convention is used for this transcription: (.) micro pause; (2) pause two seconds long; \_ syllable emphasis; Capital letters: high volume; °txt° low volume; <txt> slow speech; >txt< fast speech; : the sound is prolonged; [txt...] overlap; ((txt)) comments inserted by researcher; xxx incomprehensible speech.]

- 1 Cat: *jeg har fået at vide at jeg skal skifte navn (.) fordi det her er for*  
somebody told me that I should change my name (.) because this one is too
- 2 Ami: *hvad hedder du*  
what’s your name
- 3 Cat: *Caisha*
- 4 Ami: *okay*
- 5 Cat: *det er lidt for: (.) hvad skal jeg hed:de (.) help me.*  
it’s a bit too: (.) what shall I ca:ll myself (.) *help me*

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### HSK Language & Space

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- 6 Hel: *prøv lige og send den der*  
please send this one
- 7 Cat: *what's my name say my name you bitch*  
*what's my name say my name you bitch*
- 8 (2)
- 9 Cat: °Cai:sha° (.) *ej men hvad skal jeg he:dde.*  
°Cai:sha° (.) no but what shall I ca:ll myself
- 10 Ami: *du kan også godt hedde (.) Caisha.*  
you can just as well call yourself (.) Caisha
- 11 Cat: (>prøv lige og se< ) *fandt vi inde i den der*  
(>take a look<) we found inside here ((on a web page))
- 12 (2)
- 13 Ami: *ohh jah Caisha*  
*ohh yeah Caisha*
- 14 ((Catrine sings along with the music)) (7)
- 15 Cat: xxx *hej hjælp mig med mit navn (0.3) de cooleste og sejeste er (lige) taget.*  
xxx hey help me with my name (0.3) the coolest and toughest ones have just been taken.
- 16 Ami: *nej du kan kun xxx*  
no you can only xxx
- 17 Cat: >*hvad skal jeg hedde*<  
>what shall I call myself<
- 18 ((they search the Internet for names)) (7)
- 19 Hel: xxx ((sounds like a suggestion for a name))
- 20 Cat: *det er lidt krukkeet ikke.*  
it's a bit affected isn't it  
((about 15 seconds omitted))
- 21 Cat: *give me a name:*  
*give me a name:*
- 22 Hel: *gå ind i den der xxx* [jeg kan ikke finde den ]  
enter that one xxx [I can't find it ]
- 23 Cat: [NE:J JEG GIDER IKKE ]  
[NO I WON'T]
- 24 Cat: *men ellers så kald (0.5) ved du hvad* [det det det her kalder ] *det kalder Maja mig*  
but otherwise you could (0.5) you know what [this name ] Maja calls me this
- 25 Hel: [okay men så send den til mig så går jeg xxx]  
[okay then send it to me xxx]
- 26 Ami: *ej helt ærlig lad være*  
oh no honestly don't
- 27 Hel: *hallo jeg går ind og finder et eller andet o* [kay]  
hey I enter and find something o [kay]
- 28 Ami: [eller] *gå ind og åbn den der hjemmeside et*  
*sted ligesom xxx og få et nyt navn*  
[or] enter and open that homepage a place  
like xxx get a new name
- 29 Cat: *ne:j det er ikke noget med det hun har kaldt mig det hele tiden (.) det hedder jeg i hendes telefonbog (.)*  
no: it's not about that she has called me that all the time (.) she has that name in her phone book (.)
- 30 *bellahøjmafia*

This extract exemplifies three points that are important in the context of this article. Firstly, as mentioned in the section on language and place, the laptops play a central

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role in this community of practice, just as communication technologies do in late modern societies in general. The conversation between Catrine, Amina and Helena is an example of how the laptops are integrated into their communicative practices. The extract represents a typical way for students to spend their breaks between lessons (Quist 2005: 180–183) – their activities and their conversational topics are centered on the computers (for more on this, see Quist 2005, chapter 15, 16). Catrine and Helena are simultaneously conversing with each other, and with Amina, as they search the Internet for a new alias and the Turkish music file. Both of them ask for help and thereby they include others around them in their ongoing activities on the computers. To conduct a complete analysis of the role of the computers in this conversation, we need video recordings or other types of data that indicate what the participants are doing on the computers as they speak. We do not have such data in the current study. However, the audio recording does lend much support to the point that is important to us here, namely that computers as a means of communication form an integral part of the speakers' communicative practices.

The second important point that should be emphasized here was also addressed in the section on language and place: speaker heterogeneity in terms of linguistic and ethnic backgrounds. Catrine's parents are of Danish ethnic descent; Amina has a Danish mother and a Moroccan father; and Helena has a Greek father and a Danish mother. Although Catrine is blond, and by appearance would not be associated with immigrants, she uses an immigrant speech style, or multi-ethnolect, as part of her linguistic repertoire. For instance, in lines 29–30 she changes intonation into an unmistakable multi-ethnolectal pronunciation (Quist 2000, 2008). She does this unremarkably, without breaking the flow of speech. There is nothing ironic about it, and no signs to signal that she is not "speaking as herself". This type of shift is very common in Catrine's speech, and cannot be understood as crossing in the sense that it is used "by people who are not accepted members of the group associated with the second language they employ" (Rampton 1995: 280). Multi-ethnolect is part of Catrine's own language. There is thus, in the case of Catrine (and many others at *Metropolitanskolen*), no given one-to-one correspondence between the particular speaker category (Danish, blond) and the language used. This is linked to the third and last important point, which is the problem of extracting "authentic speech" and the (dis)connection of body and language.

Catrine's speech, from line 1 to line 30: is constantly changing, using different voice qualities, different languages and language varieties. Although the situation is casual and relaxed – and the event typical – it is not possible to judge when Catrine is speaking authentically as "herself". She sings (line 14), speaks loudly, even shouts (line 23) and whispers (line 9); in lines 5, 7 and 21 she switches from Danish into English (italicized in the gloss); and in lines 29–30 she uses a multi-ethnolectal pronunciation. In line 5: she says with an almost importunate voice "what shall I call myself", as if she was begging the others for vital help. The begging is underlined by the proceeding switch into English, "help me", which she enunciates in such a way as to sound as if she were crying. Nobody thinks she is crying of course. The utterance is produced with a kind of ironic distance, as if it was a direct quote from an American soap or mainstream Hollywood movie. The other two shifts into English (lines 7 and 21) also appear in the form of imitation or quotation, but they are enunciated very differently. "What's my name say my name you bitch" is said with a rhythm and intonation suggesting Catrine is copying a line from a rap song. There is something insistent, even chant-like, about this

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utterance that makes it very different from “help me” in Catrine’s previous turn, so it cannot be understood as a continuation of the former (English) voice. Catrine’s hip-hop voice in line 7 resembles the type of language used in verbal hip-hop battling (Bejder and Holt 2005: 6–7). In hip-hop, it is common for the rapper to call on others to say his (because it is typically a male) name as a way to show respect. Catrine is a big fan of the rapper TuPac. She writes his name everywhere and she has pictures of him on her laptop screen. In a rap song, TuPac sings, for example, “Scream my name / cause baby it’s delicious / got a weak spot for pretty bitches”; “What’s my motherfucking name nigga?”. These are examples of requests to say (or “scream”) the name of the rapper and the use of the invective “bitch”. Catrine’s “what’s my name say my name you bitch” appears in line 5 after she has asked her friends for help to find a new name. Helena does not take up this request. Instead, she keeps on doing her own thing, searching for music on her computer, and asking Catrine in line 6 to “send this one” (“this one” being a music file). Then, as if Catrine is offended by Helena’s disregard, she answers Helena in the voice of a rapper, just as a rapper would answer an attack in a verbal battle. In this way, Catrine simultaneously restates her request for help to find a name and ignores Helena’s request.

Space does not allow a detailed analysis of every switch in language and enunciation in this conversation. The point to be stressed here – which the switches into English in lines 5 and 7 demonstrate – is that the uses of different voices and languages are not “empty” playing or fooling, around with language without a purpose. They are not superficial performances that cover Catrine’s “own”, “authentic” language. The many different voices of Catrine are part of her linguistic repertoire, which she uses with pragmatic and interactional intents related to the activity she is engaged in and the goals she wishes to pursue. What Catrine does in this extract is not uncommon in the community of practice at *Metropolitanskolen*. In the words of Jørgensen (2004), she is doing *linguaging*, i. e., she is a *languager*: “speakers employ whatever linguistic features are at their disposal” to achieve their communicative goals as best they can. Robert Le Page made a parallel argument in a discussion with Labov about the vernacular (Le Page 1980; Labov 1980) – his words shall be the last of this section:

[e]ach individual’s competence subsumes partial knowledge of many socially-marked systems, and each individual’s performance reflects choice among those systems, constrained by the social and psychological factors operating upon him at any given moment

(Le Page 1980: 336).

## 5. Conclusion

The goal of this article was to examine and problematize the often taken-for-granted ties between language and place, place and body, and body and language. The community of practice at *Metropolitanskolen* in Copenhagen makes the case in point by demonstrating the difficulty of maintaining fixed ties between language, body and place. These ties are more or less dissolved in the late modern city, where mobility, new communication technologies and heterogeneity in terms of speaker backgrounds reorganize communicative spaces and practices. Treating a place like Copenhagen as having one language or two sociolects would be a considerable oversimplification. It would treat speakers as



incarnating only one language or dialect, even though what speakers do in real daily life is to constantly employ a broad repertoire of linguistic codes.

We saw in the section on body and place that the students at *Metropolitanskolen* occupy the physical location in regular patterns linked to their practices and social styles. The boys who stay in the courtyard during breaks, who sit next to each other at the back of the classroom during lessons, and who leave the school premises at lunchtime also share a series of other practices that in the course of daily repetition cluster together in a *style cluster*. Characteristic of the speech of these boys is, among other things, the long affrication of *t* in onset position. The long affrication of *t* in earlier studies was found to correlate with working class Copenhagen speech, i.e., the low Copenhagen sociolect. This is not the case at *Metropolitanskolen* (the social class of the parents does not seem to matter). Instead, we find that the long affricated *t* is used in stylistic practices as a linguistic resource that combines with “white” masculinity and an apparent anti-school attitude.

In the section on language and body, we saw how problematic it is to maintain a “one body – one language” ideology in the community of practice at *Metropolitanskolen*. Catrine and her friends mix all kinds of linguistic resources in their communicative activities. Just as with the boys who use longer *t*-affrications than everybody else, Catrine’s practices, including her use of multi-ethnolect and her fascination with North American hip-hop, form part of a *style cluster*. When Catrine, for instance, is able to successfully employ multi-ethnolect in a conversation, it is because she – in the course of stylistic practice – has created a position where multi-ethnolect becomes accepted as part of her language. Thus, mixing and switching do not happen at random, but are parts of social practices in which it is possible to act against expectations (expectations like “a blond Danish-looking girl does not use multi-ethnolect”; see Quist and Jørgensen [2006] for a discussion of who is and who is not able to use multi-ethnolect as part of his or her language.).

The intention of this article was not to show that geographical place, the body and language (language defined as a linguistic system) do not matter; they do. But nonetheless, they exist as social constructs with complex and dynamic connections, not as given entities with fixed ties and social meanings. If we wish to understand why they matter and how they work together, we need operationalizable notions that grasp the dynamism and the processual connections between them. In this article, I have suggested that style, practice and community of practice constitute such notions.

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